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A BOOK OF VERSE

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A. L. M. GOTTSCHALK



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A Book of Verse.

BY

Alfred L. M. Gottschalk.

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To
MY MOTHER

who has taught me whatever I know
of gentleness and steadfast loyalty,

* this little book is *

Dedicated.

CONTENTS.



At Daybreak	5
Regina Populorum	7
Tramping	9
One in the Crowd	10
The King's Daughter	11
Rosemonde	14
The Small Knight's Outgoing	18
The Quest	19
A Mot for the Hunting Horn	20
To Some Dead Viol Maker	21
The Ghost o' the Gods	22
Winter Twilight	23
Her Rose	24
An Offering	25
Et Nos Mutamur	26
Cynical	27
After the Fight	28
The Clinching Argument	29
St. Sylvester's Eve	30
In Chapel	31

A BOOK OF VERSE.



AT DAYBREAK.

Under the rising sun he lay,
Whose ruddy, golden rays shot o'er
The shining sea and rugged shore
Lifeless. For him thus brake the day.

It was a great, gold dawn that came
To find him lying there supine,
A stark form motionless ; the brine
Lapping his shoon, and the dawn's flame

Gilding his set young features there.
His mail-clad arms athwart his breast
Lay crossed, and there was chilly rest
On brow and cheek, as if of prayer.

Beside him lay upon the sand
His falchion bared and shining blue,
Also the splintered lance of yew
Lay, gisant, on his other hand.

No sound, no sign to tell the story
Further than this : A dead man prone
Upon a beach, the blue sea's moan
About him and the red dawn's glory.

How came this death about ? None knows.
Read each the legend as he may.
Yet as I sing Lord God, I pray
Thou give my life such restful close !

Perchance some beast came out o' the sea,
And wound him round with wormy toils,
Till, crushed amid the dragon's coils,
He met his death right manfully ;

Or evil sprites that flit by night
Clutched him, and clutching slew him, or
Some passing champion smote him sore,
And left him there in sorry plight.

Or else—since often strange things be—
After a weary pilgrimage
He halted at the water's edge,
To watch the sunset and the sea,

And when the cold, pure moon rose up
His fluttering soul sent forth a prayer,
And wide-eyed saw in Heaven there
The vision of the Joseph's cup.

Then o'er his knee he brake the lance
 And snapped the useless sword in twain
 Flinging both far, and then was fain
 To drink deep the moon's radiance,

Before he lay him down in peace—
 Arms crossed, eyes veiled, lips tremulous
 With prayers unuttered . . .

Haply thus
 God's angel brought his soul's release.



REGINA POPULORUM.

She was a queen, such as a queen should be,
 Who dragged a jewelled flood of rich
 brocade
 Over the tessellated floors, inlaid
 With hued stones, haughtily.

And as she walked she went in regal guise,
 Unconscious, sowing heartaches and numb
 pain ;
 Upon her carven lips a calm disdain,
 Indifference in her eyes.

Nor looked she at the tinselled troubadours,
Whose slender fingers fittingly caressed
The tense strings into love tunes; she
possessed

Her thoughts for paramours.

And she, the queen—'twas thus the legend
ran—

Who could have set her small foot, silken-
shod,

Upon the necks of the elect of God,
Cared for no living man.

Then, as men sometimes do, her knights
grew wild

For frenzied jousts, and many a bright blade
brake,

Spattered with blood and brains, for her
love's sake.

And yet she never smiled

Till, frightened at the sea of tossing crests,
The clarion's blare, or the steel's strident
ring,

Her ape, a noisome and outlandish thing,
Cowered, grinning, between her breasts.

TRAMPING.

A crazy traveler am I,
Heart-free—care-free,
The little dusty butterfly,
That kisses flowers and flutters by,
And bears me company
Is kith and kin to me.

I am the step-child of the sun
The husband of the summer moons
The birds and I sing two-part tunes,
They are my brothers, every one.

The wild, free winds that fret and blare
The rushing rains, the stars that shine
The rainbows and the dawns are mine,
And mine to follow everywhere.

Let honest folk look all askance
And silly-wise
Proclaim one but a freak-of-chance,
My life the most disgraceful dance
E'er danced beneath the skies—
Dear Lord, where *are* their eyes?

ONE IN THE CROWD.

From matin chime to even bell,
Now up, now down,
He wanders through the town ;
Even the blind beggar knows his footsteps
well.

His face is void, preoccupied
With some vague thought
That evermore, half-caught,
Eludes him as he stares, eyes opened wide,

Unwatchful of the passing show
And of the throng
That, hurrying along,
With jostling elbows bump him as they go.

Through trodden mud his steps he plies
—Fate's humble tool.
And yet this wide-mouthed fool
Walks with his head among the spangled
skies !

THE KING'S DAUGHTER.

Along the marble piers,
That kiss the curled blue water
Walks the king's daughter.

(The barefoot Cordeliers,
Wine-bloated, garlic-scented,
Call her demented—

Thus has she been for years.)
Her gold hair streams behind her,
And the tears blind her.

Each time a galley nears
Her foolish, sad heart flutters ;
Some cry she utters !

Then weeps such silly tears
For the barks that, wreathed with garlands,
Left for the far lands.

Hers are strange, sickening fears,
Though the riven sunbeams glancing
Set the waves dancing.

But the cool, curved water sneers
At her sorrow and repining,
And the sun keeps shining.

NOWELL.

*Little white child that wast born to-day
 All in a lowly manger
 Under the great Star's radiant ray,
 Save, oh save me fro' danger !*

Maid Mary she looked on the broad hillside,
 For she had grievous fears,
 Maid Mary she looked on the plain so wide,
 And her blue eyes filled with tears.

“ O Joseph, O Joseph ” and “ Joseph,” she cried,
 “ The promised Star shines bright,
 But there’s never a bed nor a fireside
 For me and my babe to-night ! ”

“ Take heart, take heart, Maid Mary,” he said,
 “ And trust in the guiding star,
 The God of Abram his tent shall spread
 Where you and the baby are ! ”

And over the dank grass and over the plain,
 And over the hill’s broad crest,
 Maid Mary she went in her dolorous pain,
 While the little child leaped in her breast.

"O Joseph, O Joseph" and "Joseph," she cried,

I never can reach the town,
For weal or for woe and whatever betide,
Here must I lay me down."

"One step," quoth Joseph, "but one step more,

And then we reach the city—"

Maid Mary she stopped at a stable door,
So pale, 'twas wonderful pity !

"Nay, Joseph, nay, Joseph, nay, Joseph,"
she cried,

"I faint for my pain," said she,

"And here must thou make us a lowly bed,
For my little one and for me."

And so was the little child born that night,
In the dark and lowly stall,

He that was Power and Radiance and Light,
He that was Lord of All.

And never a soul knew the wondrous tale,

Save three who were called by the Star,

Who came when the dawn came, faint and pale,

Three glittering kings from afar.

And each bent the knee to Him and to Her,
 And each his gifts unrolled
 Odorous frankincense, fragrant myrrh
 And blazing splendor of gold.

And the ox and the ass looked each at the
 other
 With, dull, slow, stupid eyes,
 Saying, "This must, forsooth, be some
 King, oh brother,
 That in our manger lies!"

*Little white child that wast born to-day
 All in a lowly manger,
 Under the great Star's radiant ray,
 Save, oh save us fro' danger!*



ROSEMONDE.

She waited long. But still he never came
 —The Knight she dreamed of in her girlish
 days,
 Strong, chaste and beautiful, for men to gaze
 And women wonder at. Her taper's flame
 Burned each night at her window, in th'
 event

That having come at last, her Knight might
see

That she had kept the vigil loyally,
And conjure up her lithe form slightly bent
Over the tapestry, whereon she strove
To limn the legend of a time long dead,
And a Mysterious Cup that vanished.

Beneath her jewelled fingers, as they wove
The strands of azure, gules and paly gold,
The picture grew, and still he never came.

Yet she bent daily above her broidery-frame,
And each new night her casement, as of
old,

Shone for him. Oft she fancied he had
come,

She heard his charger's hoofbeats on the
stones,

She dreamt a dream of martial trumpet
tones,

And warring clangor of the kettledrum,
And loud huzzas, whose every echo stirred
Her casement-blind. Down looked she to
the court,

Many a time, to see naught but the sport
Of the rough, noisy men-at-arms. No
word

She spake, but wept. Anon, they tried to wed
Her to some kinsman, who, 'twas said, found grace
In the King's sight. She lifted up her face
From her embroidery, "I will wait," she said,
"Yet for a while." And so the years wore on.
Her women, one by one, were portioned off
To divers husbands, there were not enough
Left, in the end, to help her don a gown
Or coif. Th' insensate things about her room
Grew strangely living now. With dull, round eyes
Th' heraldic beasts upon the tapestries,
And the carved leopards, couchant in the gloom
Of obscure cornices, looked down at her
Wistfully. Oft she thought that she must be
Possessed. She'd tell her beads on bended knee,
Then rise, once more to see things as they were.

Thus she dreamed on, and dreaming knew
no shame,
Until—one night, when the All-seeing Eye
Decreed a newer era—the cleft sky
Brake, and the castle vanished in thin
flame.

* * * *

Who liveth loyal to his trust, men say,
Even in this age, grows mightier than Kings
To read the meaning of the Unseen Things.

To such an one, who striveth day by day
In outer darkness, there will come a light
Resplendent. It will lead him past all ill,
To her who dreameth, sad-eyed, waiting still
The coming of her liege, the Unsullied
Knight.

They twain will look into each other's
eyes
—Just one swift glance—then linking hand
in hand,
Will walk abroad, and travel through that
land
Of mystery into greater mysteries.

THE SMALL KNIGHT'S OUTGOING.

Over the causeway and through the tall gate,
Gallantly, gallantly riding,
Cometh a small knight, all elate
With the joy of his harness's golden weight
—Down the steep hillside and out of the
town,
Gallantly, gallantly, galloping down.

Blue overhead arch the azure-domed skies,
Full of the cool Springtime's splendor ;
Brown at the hill's foot the broad highway
lies,
Stretching far out beyond reach of his eyes,
Into the land of Great-deeds-to-be-done,
Where his courser shall carry him gallop-
ing on.

Into the morning so proudly rides he
—Handsome himself as the morning !—
Gold curls from under steel casque floating
free,
Blue eyes so full of youth's high hope and
glee ;
Galloping, galloping, recklessly bold,
Into the new life and out of the old !

Jesu-babe, Son of our All-Mighty Lord
—Born without sin and dead sinless—
Over this small knight have watch and have
ward !

Keep Thou unsullied his 'scutcheon and
sword !

Long let him gallop about among men,
Till he draw rein at last at Thy portals !

Amen.



THE QUEST.

“ Full many a knight,” old Merlin cried,
“ Has laughed at my behest,
And riding forth, as now you ride,
Forgot his sacred quest.

For many loiter by the way
To catch some maiden’s eye”—
But nothing did Sir Mordaunt say,
And, laughingly, rode by.

Sir Mordaunt never found the Grail,
And, ere the year was o’er,
Old Merlin saw him, shrunk and pale,
Beside his castle door.

" I heard," the sage exclaimed in wrath,
 " How thou hast wrecked thy life ;
 Departing from fair glory's path
 To bring thee back—a wife ! "

" Yes," said Sir Mordaunt, " I did fail,
 But now I rue my error ;
 I went to seek the Holy Grail,
 And found a Holy Terror ! "



"A MOT FOR THE HUNTING-HORN."

So-ho, So-ho,
 Blow my good horn, blow !
 The rest of the chase may blow for the deer
 That is lying dead ; but thou
 Blowest a note that One will hear,
 Knowing thereby her lover is near,
 And dreaming of her even now.

Even now—even now.
 Let them all of them rail at the power of love,
 'Tis little they dream o' the wiles thereof !

So-ho, So-ho,
 My love, I love thee so !

TO SOME DEAD VIOL-MAKER.

Oh, viol-builder of long ago,

Wherever you lived and whoever you were
—Stradivarius, Maggini or Gasparo

Does not your dead heart quiver and stir
At the thought that her fingers and fitting
bow

Speak to your fiddle in accents such
That every glistening swell and curve
Which you fashioned so carefully, loved so
much,
As you fashioned it, throbs like some
sensitive nerve,
Under the tender spell of her touch?

* * * *

None of us, doubtless, will ever find out
Whether she plays like the Prince of Sin,
Or, whether, perhaps, when there's no one
about

She talks to the soul of her violin.
I only know that the dear child locks
Her heart 'neath the lid of her viol-box.

THE GHOSTS O' THE GODS.

Priests in the purple, that secretly schemed ;
Upstarts that rose, to lie down again ;
Seers that prophesied ; dreamers that
dreamed
—Forgetting the while they were mortal
men.

Queens that bloomed in the olden days ;
Warriors that warred against terrible odds,
Poets that sung them in flamboyant lays,
All are dead as the ghosts o' the old, dead
gods.

But the ghosts of the dead gods of long ago,
As they prowl abroad by night through
the earth,
Peer and whisper and laugh, ho-ho,
And nudge each other in monstrous mirth.

They leer at our world of brick and time,
At the churches built for the White
Christ's sake,
And then, as they think of the Olden Time,
They laugh till their huge sides quiver
and ache.

" And this," says the one to the other,
perchance,

Who smiles at the saying, and gravely
nods.

— " And this was the world that must needs
advance

Beyond the reign of its former gods ? "



WINTER TWILIGHT.

The sun is cold, and shrouded in a cloud,
Like some old friar who in cowl of gray,
With ashy face averted, head low bowed,
And hands clasped on his breast, doth
meekly pray
For death that comes not. . . .

Ice-bound is the stream,
And through the leafless trees of copse and
hill,
The winds are whistling, chilly and shrill ;
Afar, the lights of village households gleam
And night is lowering. . . .

From the frozen plain—
 A faint sound, choked by Winter's sinewy
 hands,—
 Comes the harsh ringing of some distant
 train ;
 In the marsh, beside the heron's empty nest,
 Your comic poet stands. . . .



“ HER ROSE.”

This is the rose that was pressed
 To your breast
 All night, yesternight, is it not?
 This was your flower, this withered, brown
 blot,
 On the white of the gravel walk lying,
 And dying,
 This morning ?
 Ah, lady, and what
 Will you do, at the close
 Of some evening—with me—who was dying
 —God knows !—
 Last night to change place with your rose ?

AN OFFERING.

I am of those who would climb
Higher than ever sat Peter,
—Some may hold armor completer
(That I confess) against Time—
Yet I deal only in Rhyme,
Yet I adore Rhyme and Metre.

Words that melodiously chime
—Silver bells could not sound sweeter—
Make Life pass by all the fleeter.
“ Better be burnt in quick-lime,”
Thus saith the wise man, “ than rhyme ! ”
Yet I adore Rhyme and Metre.

L'ENVOY.

Lady, I've done naught sublime
In my poor songs—some fire-eater
Might call me a silly repeater.

Still I dare bring you this rhyme,
I who adore—Rhyme and Metre.

ET NOS MUTAMUR.

Why, when the river grows a duller grey,
And overhead the sky is overcast
With flights of shadows, when the time is
past

For mad blossoming flowers of yesterday,
Do you, who so long held my heart in
play,

Whisper " 'Tis time now—I am thine at
last?"

Do you not know the fertile fields we
ranged

In fancy's love-time, now are dead and sere,
That even the awe-struck woods are mute
for fear,

And bird from bird sits on the bough
estranged?

Do you not know that everything is
changed,

Now, at the ebb-tide of the turning year?

O love of long ago, where are the times
Of sweet, blind hope, and timid, furtive joys,
The scarlet summer with its din and noise,

And where the rich and once so fluent
rhymes?

—All dead. Your present love-speech
barely chimes

With the faint echo of a long-dead voice.



CYNICAL ?

I might build me a syrinx, like Pan,
Or a tortoiseshell lyre, like Apollo's,
And in proud flights that rival the swallow's,
Might put Metaphysics to Man.

I might sing that Life lasts but a span,
That this very short span's not so hollow
As some men would make it ; 'twould follow
That the Kosmos is built on a plan.

Of Equality, Justice and Truth,
—I might sing in this strain for a year,
In a thousand-odd cantos, forsooth,

And the well-fed crowd surging about
Might believe. But I very much fear
That I, famous—and hungry—might doubt.

AFTER THE FIGHT.

Through the hauberk's splintered crack
I watched my life-blood, flowing black,
Trickling down my surcoat's length ;
Bye-and-bye, for lack of strength,
I set the whole world's gain at naught,
And lay there, on my back, and thought.

At high noon the truands came,
Drunk with plunder, dead to shame,
But they touched me not, for I
Still stared fiercely at the sky.
And I thought " 'Tis the world's way ;
Live and plunder while ye may !"

At the dusk, the crows drew near.
I could see them blink, and peer
With bright eyes, that seemed to speak
The longings of each fetid beak.
And I thought " 'Tis the world's lot ;
Live and fight and die and rot !"

And, at last, the moon's white shield
 Hung above the carnage-field,
 And grim spectres closed around,
 Threateningly, without a sound.
 Then I prayed to Maid-Marie,
 —And the sky fell down on me !



THE CLINCHING ARGUMENT.

Thou wert born to sing in the night time,
 And only the songs of thy heart !
 But if thou handlest the light rhyme
 With the rhymers consummate art,
 Thou canst sing as well in the light.
 Better be paid for thy singing by day
 Than sing—and starve—in the night !

Here is gold. Dost hear it ring
 On the table's massive oak ?
 Take thy cithern from under thy cloak,
 —Fool !—
 And sit in the sunlight—and sing !

“ST. SYLVESTER’S EVE.”

The winter wind is moaning through the hall,
The fire burns low ;
And on the faded arras of the wall
Fantastic shadows, tapering tall
And ghostlike, come and go.

Over the vast expanse of chilly snow,
—The old year’s pall—
The clock-tower’s chime rings faintly, sad
and slow,
As if it ushered by, in tattered woe,
Some pauper funeral.

Another year gone by, and is this all
I have to show ?
Twelve months of life gone, spent beyond
recall ?—
There is no answer in the flakes that fall
Without, and who may know ?

IN CHAPEL.

Lord Christ from Thy tall panel of stained
glass,

Why gaze at me with such wan, wistful eyes?
Are not the minster's gorgeous blazonries
—This pomp of onyx, velvets and chased
brass

Enough of reverence? People kneel and
pass

All day before Thy shrine with prayers and
sighs;

From jewelled censers th' incense-clouds
arise

To do Thee homage; even I, alas!

Who have known sorrow, raise my voice to
chord

With the great organ's loud triumphant
strain,

And yet thou still dost gaze at me, my Lord,
With such wan wistfulness my heart takes
fright.

Canst Thou, who once didst suffer grievous
pain,

Not pitying read one secret heart aright?

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